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# The Concept of the Hunt in Persian Literature

WILLIAM L. HANAWAY, JR.

If we view literature as a mirror of culture, we must define the configuration of the mirror we hold before us, for not all mirrors are equal in size and shape. Our mirror now is the literature of Islamic Persia, a rich literature with roots going back to the hymns of Zoroaster and the inscriptions of Darius. The reflection to be examined is the concept of the hunt. In Persian literature, which will be taken in the narrower sense to mean poetry and occasionally the prose of historians and popular storytellers, the hunt is a vital and productive theme.

Persian poetry has certain characteristics which bear mentioning here. In form it is rigidly controlled by intricate rules of prosody and rhyme. Furthermore, it has a structural aspect which strikes the Western reader at once: its apparent lack of logical coherence. It has a clearly defined external form, but except for narrative poetry, it lacks the internal links that Westerners expect in their own poetry. There are indeed internal links in Persian poems, but they are of a subtler nature and will not be discussed here. It will be enough to say that the initial impression one gets from reading a Persian poem is of a sequence of separate and perfectly finished lines, held together only by the bonds of meter and rhyme. Because of this quality, extended metaphors are not common, and at the same time it is possible to pluck out lines and discuss them without reference to their context except in the broadest sense. Naturally, the lines of narrative poetry are more closely and logically connected, because they must tell a story.

In this essay the concept of the hunt will be examined in Persian literature written before and during the Safavid period, that is, to the end of the seventeenth century. I shall look first at narrative poetry: the epics and their descendants, the romances. From there I shall proceed to panegyric poetry and conclude with lyric and mystical poetry. On the way, examples from the prose of historians and from the popular romances of the storytellers will be introduced. I shall seek to isolate a coherent group of associations produced in the reader's mind by the hunt theme and try to show how these associations relate and interact on different levels as multilayered metaphors. The hunt theme will also be examined as a formal literary device for the articulation of a plot.

Persian poetry, as already mentioned, is characterized by strict formal conventions; it is also defined by thematic conventions. These are relatively few in number and reappear frequently, the emphasis being not on *what* is said but rather on *how* it

is said. The concept of the hunt is a part of the standard inventory of thematic material in the earliest surviving Persian poetry. As a metaphor the hunt was employed by panegyric, lyric, and mystical poets throughout the whole period under consideration and was adapted to fit each genre and to express ideas or emotions on multiple levels. A final feature requiring mention is that, with the exception of a modest amount of folk poetry and a few popular romances, all the literature in the period under discussion was court literature. Poets and historians were attached to the courts of princes and patronized by them, in return for which patronage they were expected to produce panegyrics. This is a particularly important point because the hunt was the royal sport *par excellence*. Since the hunt requires the qualities of strength, skill, and valor, the poet found in the concept of the hunt a natural source of similes and metaphors which he could use to exalt his patron. As an objective event the hunt is an integral part of the narrative poetry. As a concept, aspects or components of it are abstracted and used as the building blocks of poetry in praise of a patron.

As the hunt theme appears in the different genres and at different times, various associations are engendered in the reader's mind, and these can be arranged in four groups:

1. The physical action, zest, and high spirits of the hunter. Hunting is a sport, something done at leisure, and along with the action and excitement is the comradeship of the hunter's companions during the hunt and at the end of the day, when the wine is passed around.
2. The bravery, skill, and stamina required by the hunt. All the masculine virtues are displayed here.
3. The relentless pursuit of the prey and its final capture by the hunter or his hawk or panther.
4. The violence, ruthlessness, cruelty, blood, and death that necessarily accompany the hunt.

Hunting for sport was one of the royal pastimes. According to Farrokhi of Sistan (d. 1037),

There were four things chosen for kings to do,  
Feasting, polo, war, and hunting.'

I shall now focus more closely on some aspects of the concept of the hunt in Persian literature. For the writer of narrative poetry the hunt provided the material for set pieces in which he could display his skill in describing active and colorful scenes. An excellent example is in Asadi Tusi's (fl. 1064) *Garshasp Nama*. First the poet sets the stage by giving a description of nature:

At dawn they decided to hunt, for it was spring and the time for hunting. The garden's face was washed with dew and the roses were sprinkling their petals. The crow's heart was at rest from the pains of autumn, and the clouds formed dark birds in the sky. The tulip's mouth was filled with dew-pearls and the flowers had donned turquoise gowns. The moving clouds made the heavens look

like a hawk's wing. The birds' songs in the meadow drowned out the tunes of the musicians. It seemed as if a sac of musk had split in the air and the earth were wearing a green mantle.<sup>2</sup>

Here is the setting for the royal sport. Spring is a time of freshness on the barren plateau of Iran, the one time of the year when the earth is green and wild flowers bloom. It is a time to celebrate. The joys of spring hunting are amply described by the poets, as, for example, in this spring poem by Manuchehri (d. ca. 1040), a court poet of Mahmud of Ghazna (998–1030):

Take gold, scatter musk, take the cup and the kiss;  
Drink wine, give a flower, play polo, and hunt.<sup>3</sup>

And here are the words of Farrokhi (who was in the same court as Manuchehri) on this theme:

The air was happy with the breeze, the earth was happy  
with its dress [of flowers]  
The world was happy with beauty, the king was happy with  
hunting.<sup>4</sup>

Now to the hunt itself, as described by Asadi:

The plain was filled with wild sheep and the air was filled with birds. The dust raised by the horses darkened the sun, and the necks of onagers were in the lassos of the heroes. The dogs were in a frenzy over the rabbits, sometimes attacking and sometimes fleeing. They scratched the dry plain, sniffing the earth like a perfumer sniffing musk. The panthers held in ambush were loosed on the antelope like thieves who fall on a caravan. In the ambush the earth looked like a tulip within a tulip from their bloody claws. The ground was like onyx under the stags' hooves, and the soft sand and hard mountain slopes were red with blood. A bold eagle was seated on an antelope like a victorious hero on his steed in battle. The partridge's heart was branded by the hawk's claws, and the falcon was snatching water-birds from the heart of the clouds. In the air was a cloud of falcons and hawks, and the noise of the drummers was frightening the lions. With the fallen game scattered hither and thither, the meadow was as full of the slain as a battlefield. Sometimes with wine in hand, the heroes would listen to the playing of a rebeck, sometimes they would be roasting the loin of an onager. From every hilltop a lookout would shout, and the heroes would raise as much dust as fleeing demons. Garshasp ran on foot and laid an ambush for stags, and when they came near, he leaped from his place, seized their antlers and threw them down. He grasped two sets of antlers, and in a passion dashed one against the other. He struck them so hard that their bodies became weak, then he broke their heads and necks. He handled several this way in front of Zahhak, who praised him in amazement.<sup>5</sup>



In this colorful scene the hunt is at its height, the hunters and their animals rushing about the plain, and the birds of prey swooping down from the sky. Garshasp, in his excitement, engages stags with his bare hands. The physical pleasure and primitive joy are evident here and contrast with the blood, violence, and death that result from them.

Finally the day ends:

Then they retired to a garden for pleasure and feasting. First they cured their hangovers, then they set to feasting and music. . . . Goblets like moons in the hands of the drinkers were sprinkling the jewels of the Pleiades. The nobles were reclining on the meadow among the grasses, hyacinths, and jasmine, cups in their hands, their eyes fixed on dark-haired beauties, their ears attuned to nightingales.<sup>6</sup>

Eating, drinking, and music are the pleasant end to such a day. The opening and closing scenes of this passage thus provide a frame of relative calm for the action and violence of the hunt. Such scenes are found in Ferdowsi's (d. ca. 1021) *Shahnama* and other epics, and in the romances such as Nezami's (d. 1209) *Haft Peykar*. They are the best actual portrayals of the hunt, for in them the hunt is presented in its totality, as a connected narrative, and all of its facets are visible.

Turning now to the panegyrics, one finds that on the simplest level the king is compared with a lion, as in these lines of Mo'ezzi (d. 1126):

You be the sun and all your slaves will be like stars;  
You be a lion and all your enemies will be prey.<sup>7</sup>

Mas'ud Sa'd (d. 1121) calls him a hunter of lions:

You are victorious, a king, a Khosrow, a lord;  
You are a city-conquering general and a lion-hunting king.<sup>8</sup>

A common epithet for the patron, especially among the earlier poets, is *shir-shekar* ("lion hunter"). Specific qualities of the patron are often singled out and personified as hunting animals. Adib Saber (d. ca. 1145) likens his patron to a bird of prey:

Your majestic presence is like a falcon which is so powerful  
That it will even hunt the Angel of Death.<sup>9</sup>

Khwaju Kermani (d. ca. 1352) uses the same analogy:

Except for the falcon of your ambition, no one can remember  
A bird whose prey was the vultures of the skies.<sup>10</sup>

From Rashid al-Din Vatvat (d. 1182) come the following lines of praise:

Your genius is a garden whose fruit is ideas;  
Your liberality is a falcon which hunts good qualities.<sup>11</sup>

and of his patron Atsiz the Khwarazmshah (1127–1156) the same poet says

What is an earthly lion? The good fortune of Atsiz  
Unaided hunts the lion of the heavens [i.e., the constellation Leo].<sup>12</sup>

Vahshi Bafqi (d. 1583), a Safavid poet, pays tribute to his patron's justice thus:

With the dominating power of the hawk of your justice,  
A fly could easily hunt the *simorgh*.<sup>13</sup>

The lion is the noblest of all the wild animals. The falcon and hawk are fierce, proud, high-flying birds; when they are earthbound, they sit on the king's glove. Both the "king of beasts" and these birds of prey made appropriate symbols of the human qualities that men wanted to attribute to their rulers.

From the previous examples it is clear that exaggerated praise never harmed a poet's chances with his patron. It is one thing to compare the patron with a lion, or his liberality with a falcon, but quite another thing to personify good fortune as a lion which has as its prey not a real lion but the constellation Leo. Here the poet has exceeded the normal limit, but within the conventions of Persian rhetoric such exaggeration has a respectable place and, if cleverly handled, can be expected to produce the reactions of surprise and admiration in the reader.

From comparing the patron to a hunter of lions it is only a short step to liken him to the great hunters of the past, notably the epic hero Rostam and the Sassanian King Bahram V (421–439), nicknamed "Gur" ("Wild Ass"). For example, Farrokhi says of a patron

What you have accomplished in manliness in only a few years  
Rostam never achieved in many long years.  
If he brought down gazelles and wild asses on the hunting ground,  
You brought down dangerous lions and lion-hunting wolves.  
And if Rostam defeated an elephant in his youth,  
You have in proportion killed a thousand raging elephants.<sup>14</sup>

Using the hunt as a backdrop to set off the king's attributes of manliness and skill seems natural enough. The hunt as a source of metaphor, however, is so rich that even abstract qualities such as ambition and good fortune were related to it.

Another aspect of the hunt often emphasized by the panegyric poets is its close association with war. Many of the same qualities are required of both the hunter and the warrior. The two activities are in certain respects of the same order but undertaken for different reasons. Hunting is a sport, while war is serious business. The poets, however, have their patrons pursue war with the same enthusiasm and single-mindedness with which they pursue the hunt.

The king is often said to hunt his enemies, but more importantly, the king is a hunter of kings. This theme is expressed by Mas'ud Sa'd:

He is a king, a Khosrow whom the Khosrows of the world  
Call a king-hunter.<sup>15</sup>

and by 'Onsori (d. 1039):

The prey of the Khosrows is birds and animals;  
The commander [i.e., his patron] hunts the Khosrows.<sup>16</sup>

Farrokhi links hunting and war more closely when he addresses Mas'ud of Ghazna (1031–1041):

On the day of battle you take every king;  
On hunting day you take every lion.<sup>17</sup>

and Mas'ud Sa'd makes king-hunting Sultan Mas'ud's primary occupation:

You are a king-hunter, and when no kings are left,  
Of necessity you hunt lion.<sup>18</sup>

Farrokhi again makes reference to war in a poem devoted partly to Mahmud's hunting:

Since hunting to some extent resembles war, out of passion for battle  
When you are resting from war your thoughts turn to hunting.<sup>19</sup>

and in this passage he weaves the ideas of hunting and war into an almost seamless fabric:

Sometimes your sword raises dust from the enemy's head;  
Sometimes your arrow takes vengeance on the lion's breast.  
Alas for that enemy to whom in a battle you say "take this!"  
Alas for that lion to whom in the hunt you say "take that!"  
On hunting day it matters not to you if it be a fox or a lion;  
In battle it matters not to you if it be foot soldiers or horsemen.<sup>20</sup>

In medieval Iran hunting and war were not merely poetically linked; they resembled each other strongly in practice. Both required the manly qualities of bravery, strength, and skill. They were dangerous activities involving risk to both the hunter and the warrior. In both, the prey, human or animal, was pursued, eventually to be caught and killed. The techniques were similar and the weapons were the same, and in each case large numbers of men and horses were involved. The return from the hunt was celebrated by the poets, as was the return from war. In both there was a commitment to violence and death, and at the end of the day, after battle or hunt, the heroes relaxed with feasting and wine. The prominence given to hunting and war in medieval Persian poetry speaks eloquently of the life style of the upper classes, and these preoccupations were echoed also by the historians.

Good examples of this may be found in the Zafar Namas ("Victory Books") of Timur (d. 1405). These are chronological accounts of the life of Timur and, although of a panegyric nature, are based on actual events. They contain numerous descriptions of battles and campaigns, and interspersed among these are many descriptions

of hunting. Whenever the occasion presented itself, Timur would organize a hunt, and he would often hunt along the way while moving to attack a fortress.<sup>21</sup>

Beneath this conception of hunting as the opposite face of war may lie deeper memories of the ancient Indo-European king as a warrior-god. It is true that many of the subjects of classical panegyrics are Turks, with their equestrian and hunting traditions from central Asia. On the other hand, the same traditions are found in the purely Iranian epic *Shahnama* as well as in epics that grew out of *Shahnama* or that were based on legendary material not included in it. Rostam, for example, is as avid a hunter as he is a fighter, and there are several striking hunting scenes in which he takes part. Indeed, the characters Rostam and Garshasp (in *Garshasp Nama*) are almost the archetypes of the hunter-warrior. As a youth, Rostam is powerful and warlike, nevertheless his killing of an elephant is an incredible feat for one of his age. Garshasp often engages in single combats with animals, and in a mighty contest he slays a dragon.

There is a long tradition of kings as dragon-killers in the Iranian national legend.<sup>22</sup> One can trace in classical Persian literature the remains of the myth of the hunter-warrior-king, which begins in the Avestan literature and ends with the romances of Nezami and his imitators. Feridun in *Shahnama* is a dragon-killing king, as shown by his conquest of Zahhak. Ardashir kills a giant worm in his effort to consolidate his kingdom. Garshasp, as just mentioned, is a hunter-warrior who kills dragons in single combat.

The single combat theme reappears with the hero Bizhan in *Shahnama* who kills a number of wild boars. The theme receives its latest and most evolved treatment in the various story cycles centering on the Sassanian King Bahram V ("Gur"). Bahram also slays a dragon, but his contest is very different from that of the great legendary heroes. While Garshasp kills his dragon by means of his heroic qualities of superior strength and bravery, Bahram's is more a contest of skill. Bahram is unsurpassed in technique and strives for elegance in applying it. There is no laboring or straining, only a refined and romanticized version of the archetypal meeting of man and beast, in which there is never any doubt as to the outcome. The feeling of danger is gone, and one wonders not "Will he do it?" but "How will he do it?"

In addition to being a vehicle through which the poet can idealize the traditional male attributes and project them upon mortal kings, the concept of the hunt appears as a formal literary device. Hunting, as has been shown, was a conventional activity for a king, and therefore the hunt can be convincingly used as the setting for an incident. Such an incident can provide a change of direction in the plot by leading the hunter across a threshold to a new world, where he may have extraordinary adventures and from where he returns with special knowledge. Hunting can also bring the king face to face with individuals whom he would not ordinarily meet. These encounters allow the king to display his generosity and justice and are the means by which a writer makes a moral or didactic point.

A typical example of the hunting situation as a formal device is found in the popular prose romance *Samak-e 'Ayyar*, the unique manuscript of which dates from

the twelfth century. One of the young heroes, Prince Khorshid Shah, is indulging his passion for hunting. One evening after dinner, as he and his companions are drinking wine, Khorshid Shah sees an unusual-looking onager cross the plain. He leaves his companions and pursues the animal until dark, when he realizes that he has lost his way. He sleeps there on the plain, and the next morning the animal appears again. Khorshid Shah takes up his pursuit but cannot catch the onager. The animal runs over a hill and disappears. From the hilltop the prince looks down upon a dreadful desert, where a rich and sumptuous tent catches his eye. On investigating he finds it occupied by a beautiful girl, with whom he falls in love at first sight. The girl offers him a drink that she has drugged and that puts him to sleep. She then disappears with all her trappings, leaving him only her own ring in exchange for his. The following day the prince's companions find him sleeping in the desert and bring him home with the strange ring. With this incident the main plot of the story is set in motion.<sup>23</sup>

A similar event occurs in *Firuz Shah Nama*, where the hero is hunting and is led far afield by a beautiful onager. He is drugged, also, and is carried off to the domain of the peris, legendary, invisible beings common in Islamic popular literature.

In *Shahnama* it is while hunting that Giv, Tus, and Gudarz discover a young girl hiding in a forest. They take her back to the king, Key Kavus. The king marries the young girl, and she becomes the mother of the hero Siavush.

The hunt as a literary device appears more frequently in the mystical and didactic literature, which is anecdotal in structure and abounds in stories of kings. A variety of plausible situations in which to place the king is necessary in order to avoid repetition and sameness. Accordingly, the king is often found in court, at a feast or wine-drinking party, and hunting. The situation of the hunt offers him the opportunity to escape his courtiers and boon companions and confront the common man face to face. Sometimes the king is not recognized by the peasant, and in these cases the ruler generally returns to his entourage having gained an insight into his reputation among his subjects. On other occasions the king is recognized and is appealed to directly as the ultimate dispenser of earthly justice. He then rewards the virtuous and punishes the unjust. Or, for example, the king, while hunting, meets an old woman who has been the victim of thieves, and he is given an opportunity to display his justice. Such an incident occurs both in Sana'i's (d. 1130) *Hadiqat al-Haqiqat* and in Jami's (d. 1492) *Selsela-e Zahab*.<sup>24</sup> Many such incidents appear in 'Attar's (d. ca. 1220) *Elahi Nama* and in the stories of Bahram Gur in *Shahnama*. In *Shahnama*, Bahram Gur spends most of his time hunting, and the majority of his many adventures begin in the hunting situation. Finally, an anecdote appears in the first chapter of Sa'di's (d. 1292) *Golestan* in which Anoshirvan is hunting and has no salt for his roast game. His instructions to the soldiers to purchase the necessary salt instead of taking it by force illustrate his justice and concern for his subjects.

Thus, it can be seen how the hunt was used as a formal device to articulate the plots of epics and romances and to furnish a conventional situation in which to place a king who is to be the subject of an anecdote.

The medieval Persian poets employed the hunt in yet another manner: as a metaphor to convey a didactic lesson, amorous feelings, or a mystical message.

Daqiqi (d. ca. 978), for example, uses the analogy of the hunt when he speaks of how one should go about seizing power:

For the kingdom is a prey which  
Neither the soaring eagle nor the fierce lion can take.  
There are two things which can subdue it though:  
One is an Indian sword and the other is gold.  
You must capture it with the sword  
Then with dinars bind its feet.<sup>25</sup>

The practical wisdom that characterizes Sa'di's *Golestan* is well displayed in these lines:

The hunter does not get a jackal every time he hunts;  
One day a leopard may eat the hunter.<sup>26</sup>

The hunting-war metaphor is used by Hafez (d. 1390):

Oh, Lord, how bold are these young Turks for blood;  
Every minute they take another prey with their arrow-eyelashes.<sup>27</sup>

The metaphor of the trap and the bait is common in lyric, religious, and mystical poetry. The bait of the trap is a seed (*dana*), which is a metaphor for the beloved's mole, or beauty spot. Here is another example from Hafez:

From the snare of your locks and the bait of your beauty spot  
Not one bird of the heart remains which is not the prey of beauty.<sup>28</sup>

Mo'ezzi uses the metaphor in a similar way:

No wonder if my heart fell prey to your tresses,  
The heart will be the prey whenever the locks are the snare.<sup>29</sup>

The theme also reappears often in the verses of Khwaju Kermani:

Do not mention her beauty spot, for desire for the bait  
Is what lures the animal to the trap.<sup>30</sup>

Far from you, I am like a wild bird who has fallen  
Into a trap, lured by the scent of the bait.<sup>31</sup>

Your beauty spots have entangled lucky ones in a lasso  
And your eyes have made great hunters prey.<sup>32</sup>

and in those of Rashid al-Din Vatvat:

His [or her] two locks are like a snare and my heart is like the prey  
When has the prey ever been at peace in the snare?<sup>33</sup>

Your locks are a trap and your beauty spot the bait;  
Hunt my heart and soul with that trap and bait.<sup>34</sup>

On this level the metaphor loses its associations of physical violence, blood, and death and is refined to carry only the suggestions of pursuit and capture. Along with this narrowing of content, a note of irony creeps in, because the hunter now stands for the beloved who at least sometimes was a woman. The lover is the prey, helpless in the trap of the beloved's tresses. Sometimes, however, he wants to be caught and begs the beloved to snare him.

In religious and philosophical poetry the hunt is frequently used as a metaphor. Naser Khosrow (d. ca. 1075) uses it in its narrowest sense when he gives practical advice.

With faith you can bring the world into your snare;  
Without faith the world is nothing but a trap.<sup>35</sup>

Go, withdraw your heart from the world;  
It has drawn many like you into its trap.<sup>36</sup>

In both these examples is the suggestion of the mercilessness of the hunter toward his prey. "Hunt or be hunted," he seems to be saying in one case, and in the other he counsels withdrawal from the field to avoid the danger of being trapped. The metaphor is still attenuated in its associative potential but is stronger than in the case of the lover and the beloved. The lover might be caught and have to suffer the pangs of love and separation, but when one is involved in a hunt with the world, one's life, now and in the hereafter, is at stake. This hunt is a more serious matter, and its consequences are literally vital to the individual.

In the lyrics of Hafez, where mundane and mystical themes shade imperceptibly into one another and where both are expressed in the same poetic vocabulary, the hunt metaphor is strikingly evident.

Throw down Bahram's hunting lasso and take up Jamshid's cup  
For I have crossed this plain and there is neither Bahram nor his wild ass.<sup>37</sup>

Here the mystic traveler's advice to cease the pursuit of the attractions of this world and to seek the truth through liberation from attachment is subtly expressed. Bahram was the mighty hunter who spent most of his time pursuing wild asses, which he did with exceptional skill. Jamshid's cup allowed the possessor to see the whole world in its depths. It was a key to higher knowledge, a knowledge not possessed by the ordinary man. In one line Hafez associates the hunt and the cup, which, as has been shown, often go together as sources of earthly pleasure. On another level the hunt and cup stand for the opposites which all mystics seek to reconcile through knowledge of the Ultimate Unity. One begins by hunting for knowledge and ends with repentance for attachment to this world. One then proceeds through the stages of the mystical path to the intuitive knowledge of the Divine, a kind of knowledge which can be achieved only after laying aside the lasso by which

we snare the deceptive artifacts of the earthly life. Hafez has crossed this plain and has learned that the hunter and the hunted are illusory, that they are opposites in a world of opposites. The only reality is to be found in the cup of Jamshid, which gives the higher unified knowledge reserved only for those who no longer concern themselves with the fragmented world of earthly existence where the soul is separated from God.

The man who has achieved this kind of knowledge bears a distinguishing mark in the eyes of his fellows. This idea is expressed by Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273) in his *Divan-e Shams-e Tabrizi*:

He who bears thy brand, nobody will buy;  
Who would hunt the one who is thy prey?<sup>38</sup>

Rumi's metaphor perhaps requires some explanation. In its figurative sense it conveys the idea of the Gnostic as a man apart from the rest, no longer accessible because his loyalty is given to a higher truth; its literal meaning is well grounded in historical fact. It was the practice of Shah 'Abbas (1588–1629) and of kings before him, at the conclusion of a large hunt, to spare the life of animals that had been captured but not killed. The king's men would attach an earring with the royal seal or brand the animals with the king's brand and set them free. From then on these animals had a privileged existence, and anybody killing or capturing one of them was subject to death by the king's command.<sup>39</sup> Thus does the mystic assume a special position among his fellow men. He has been captured by the Divine King and has received a new life from Him, just as on the mundane level the captured stag is given a new and special life by the earthly king. The mystic and the stag are both protected, the latter by the law of the king, the former by the possession of divine knowledge.

The hunt was as useful a device for authors of extended mystical poems as for writers of epics and romances. The writings of 'Attar and Rumi are strongly anecdotal in character, in fact, the major part of the text of such works as 'Attar's *Elahi Nama*, *Manteq al-Tayr*, and *Oshtor Nama*, and Rumi's *Masnavi* consists of anecdotes about dervishes, mystics, merchants, and kings. The hunt also proved to be a suitable setting for these mystical anecdotes.

In 'Attar's *Mosibat Nama* there is a story of Mahmud of Ghazna who is hunting when his favorite, Ayaz (d. 1057), falls to weeping. "Why do you weep?" asks Mahmud. "From jealousy," Ayaz replies. "Why do you pursue this fleeing thing? Why do you want this that flees from you?" "I am chasing it to capture it," replies Mahmud. "My jealousy has increased one thousand times," says Ayaz. "Why not catch me instead of it?" Mahmud answers, "I want to catch it and kill it; spill its blood on the ground." "Now my jealousy is one thousand times as great. Why don't you kill me?" "I will kill it to eat it; who wants this to be his fate?" asks the king. "Now," says Ayaz, "my jealousy is beyond measure. Why don't you make food of Ayaz?" "If I make food of you," says Mahmud, "you will disappear and you will receive nothing from me." Ayaz replies, "Oh, if only the king of the world would make food of this troubled soul! Now I am only a worthless slave,



but then I would become Mahmud. That is enough for me."<sup>40</sup>

This is a well-constructed mystical anecdote, clear enough in meaning and skillfully set in a hunting situation. The desire for union with the divine is so naturally and appropriately expressed here that one must admire 'Attar as a storyteller.

A different message is conveyed by an anecdote in 'Attar's *Manteq al-Tayr*. Here, a king goes hunting with an elegantly accoutered dog. The dog stops by the way to investigate a bone, and the king becomes jealous because the dog turns away from him for the sake of a mere bone. He lets the dog go, jewels, satin, and all and continues on his way. The moral is that one should not stray from the true path because of trifles but, rather, immerse oneself completely in true love of the Divine, risking all.<sup>41</sup>

In 'Attar's *Elahi Nama*, there is another tale of Mahmud and Ayaz. One day Mahmud invites Ayaz to hunt with him, but the young man says that he has his prey already, and that is sufficient for him. "What is it?" asks Mahmud. "It is you, Mahmud, caught by the lasso of my locks." Mahmud has Ayaz tied up, but Ayaz says, "No matter what you do to me — throw me into a pit, cut off my hair, spill my blood — whether I am here or absent, you will always be my prey. The body is the branch and the heart the root, and I am in complete union with your heart. If you kill me, you will kill yourself out of grief. In this way I am the beloved, the ruler, the shah. Whether I am king or beggar, I will always be part of you."<sup>42</sup>

The interest of this anecdote again lies not in the idea but in its expression. The concept of the union of lover and beloved (or the soul with God) and of the lover losing his identity in that of the beloved, just as in the story from 'Attar's *Mosibat Nama*, is here aptly expressed through the metaphor of hunting and capture.

In conclusion, here is a story from Rumi's *Masnavi*. A bird notices some grains of wheat laid out by a hunter to attract his prey. The hunter is nearby, in disguise, and the bird does not recognize him as such. They engage in a conversation in which the hunter claims that he is an ascetic who has retired from the world. The bird reminds him that the prophet Mohammad forbade monasticism in Islam. The bird is very hungry and eyes the wheat, which the hunter says is a trust for an orphan having no guardian. The bird knows that to eat without a real need is a sin, and that it is even a sin to eat out of necessity if no pledge of recompense is given. The bird's hunger gets the better of him, and he eats the wheat. As a result he falls into the trap. The hunter has no sympathy for the bird's cries for help and reminds him that he should have called for help earlier when the devil was tempting him. "This is fitting punishment for one who listens to the beguiling talk of ascetics," says the bird. "No," says the hunter-ascetic, "it is fitting punishment for those who dip their bread in the soup before it is served." The bird prays for forgiveness, and Rumi preaches a sermon on awakening from slumber and perceiving the truth.<sup>43</sup>

Here again the message may be understood on more than one level. The hunter catches his bird by baiting his trap and waiting patiently. But who is the hunter, and who is the bird? The carnal soul of the bird gets the better of him, and he is condemned to entrapment. His cries for help are not heeded by the hunter — indeed,

what hunter heeds the cries of his prey? This metaphorical hunt is lifted at once from the earthly to the spiritual level by the ambiguous identity of the hunter, who — according to Rumi — is an ordinary hunter, but who tells the bird that he is an ascetic. The hunter, symbolizing the human being in pursuit of the trappings of the material world, and the ascetic who has renounced the world, are opposites. Rumi suggests that these opposites are here combined in one person. It is known from the Koran that Allah tests the strength of his creatures, thus adding weight to this suggestion. The personification of the bird completes the metaphor, and the anecdote can be read as an allegory.

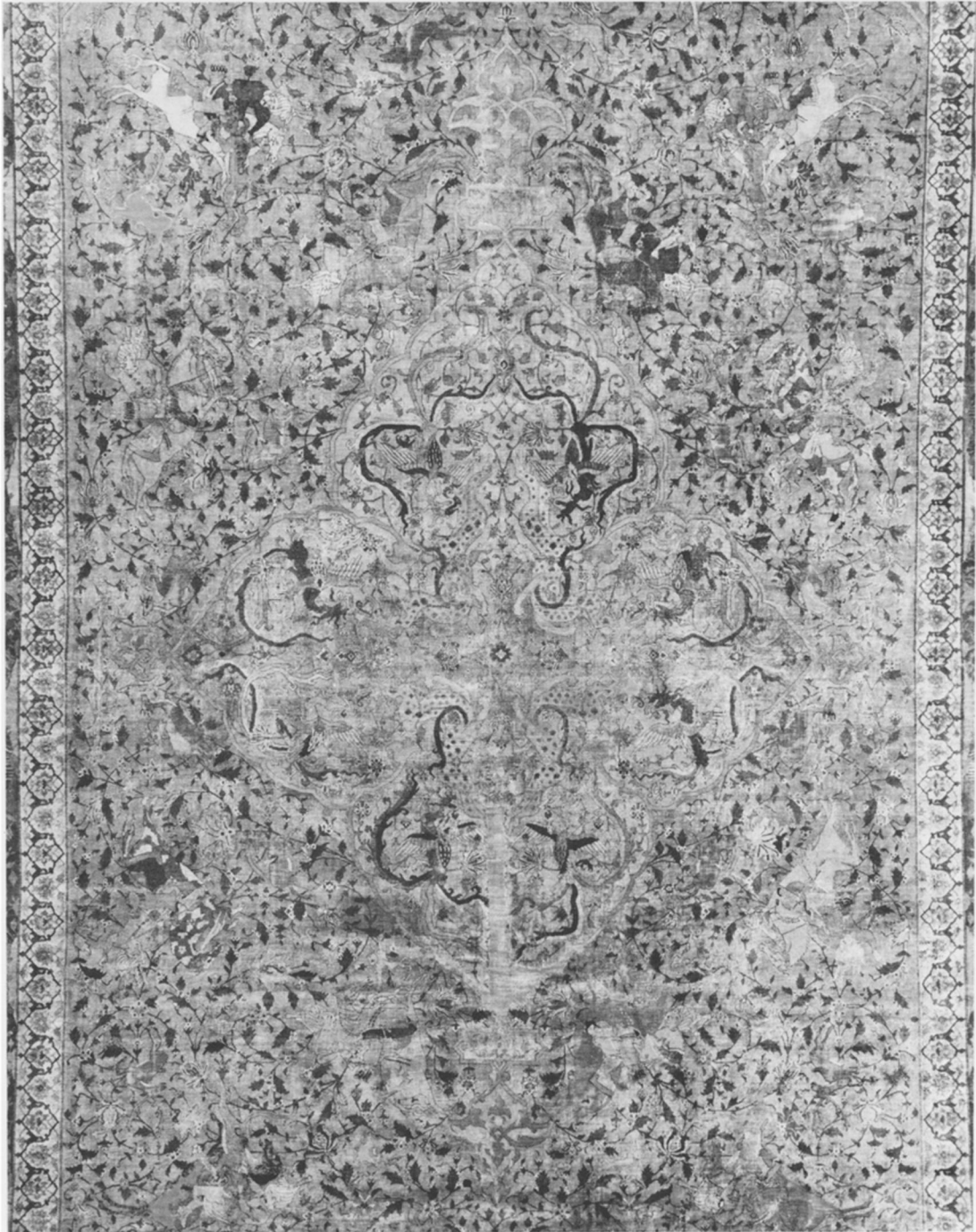
Thus one may look into the mirror of pre-Safavid literature and catch sight of the hunt as it is reflected in the work of the early poets. Here it is seen as an epic set piece or a panegyric theme that stressed the masculine qualities of bravery, strength, and skill. One may observe its evolution into a didactic and finally a mystical metaphor, as used by such writers as ‘Attar and Rumi, but shorn of its associations of manly valor, physical violence, blood, and death. The concept is narrowed by the mystical writers to include only a fraction of its earlier fullness and color, but at the same time it is deepened in meaning and elevated to the spiritual plane to express the fate of man’s soul.

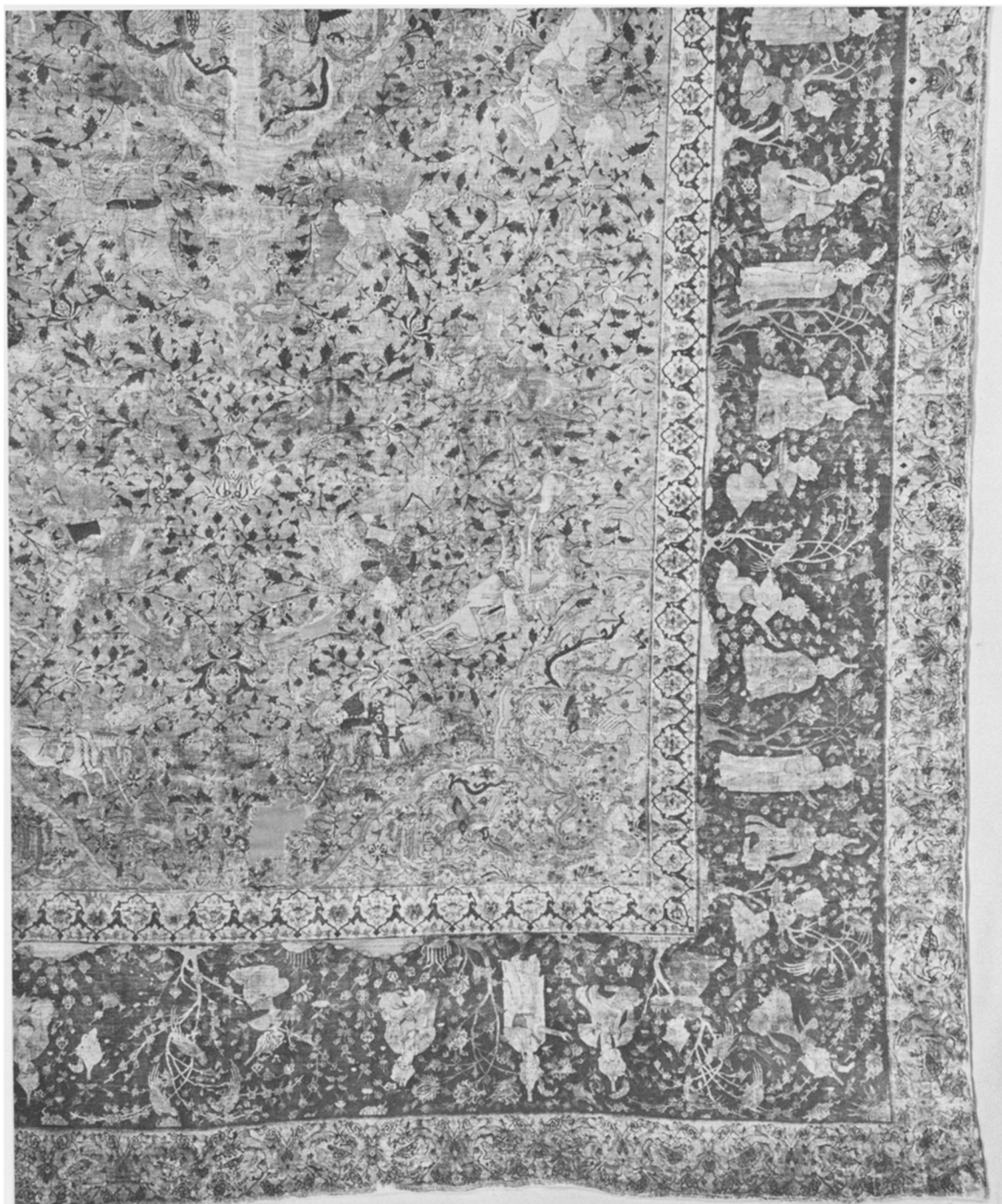
#### NOTES

1. Farrokhi Sistani, *Divan*, ed. Mohammad Dabirsiaqi (Tehran, 1335 [1957]), p. 102. (English translation of all quotations is mine.)
2. Abu Nasr ‘Ali ibn Ahmad Asadi Tusi, *Garshasp Nama*, ed. Habib Yaghma’i (Tehran, 1317 [1939]), p. 270; trans. into French by Henri Massé (Paris, 1951), p. 122. For a similar description of spring that sets the stage for a hunt, see Fakhr al-Din Gorgani, *Vis o Ramin*, ed. Mohammad Ja’far Mahjub (Tehran, 1337 [1959]), pp. 352–353.
3. Manuchehri, *Divan*, ed. Mohammad Dabirsiaqi (Tehran, 1338 [1960]), p. 40.
4. Farrokhi, *Divan*, p. 145.
5. Asadi, *Garshasp Nama*, pp. 270–271; French trans., pp. 122–123. For another such hunting scene see Ferdowsi, *Shahnama* (Tehran: Berukhim, 1313 [1935]), vol. 2, pp. 417–418, and p. 417, n. 7.
6. Asadi, *Garshasp Nama*, p. 271; French trans., p. 123.
7. Amir ‘Abd Allah Mohammad Mo’ezzi, *Divan*, ed. ‘Abbas Eqbal (Tehran, 1318 [1940]), p. 222.
8. Mas’ud Sa’d Salman, *Divan*, ed. Rashid Yasemi (Tehran, 1339 [1961]), p. 193.
9. Adib Saber Termezi, *Divan*, ed. ‘Ali Qavim (Tehran, 1331 [1953]), p. 115.
10. Kamal al-Din Khwaju Kermani, *Divan*, ed. Ahmad Soheyl Khwansari (Tehran, 1336 [1958]), p. 48.
11. Rashid al-Din Vatvat, *Divan*, ed. Sa’id Nafisi (Tehran, 1339 [1961]), p. 248.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
13. Vahshi Bafqi, *Divan*, ed. M. Darvish (Tehran, 1339 [1961]), p. 6. The *simorgh* is a mythical bird of great size, possessed of magical powers. For further discussion of this bird in Iranian literature and art, see R. Ettinghausen, “The Boston Hunting Carpet in Historical Perspective,” p. 72 in this issue.
14. Farrokhi, *Divan*, p. 130. For a comparison of the patron with Bahram Gur, see Mo’ezzi, *Divan*, p. 225.
15. Mas’ud Sa’d, *Divan*, p. 182.

16. Abu al-Qasem Hasan 'Onsori, *Divan*, ed. Yahya Qarib (Tehran, 1341 [1963]), p. 44.
17. Farrokhi, *Divan*, p. 152.
18. Mas'ud Sa'd, *Divan*, p. 223.
19. Farrokhi, *Divan*, p. 77.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
21. See, for example, Nezam al-Din Shami, *Zafar Nama*, ed. Felix Tauer (Prague, 1937), vol. 1, pp. 118–119, 156–157, 237. See also Sharaf al-Din 'Ali Yazdi, *Zafar Nama*, ed. Mohammad 'Abbasi (Tehran, 1336 [1958]), vol. 2, pp. 131, 253–254.
22. See Geo Widengren, "The Sacral Kingship of Iran," *La Regalità Sacra* (Leiden, 1959), pp. 252–253. See also the reliefs at Persepolis showing Darius in single combat with a winged lion.
23. Faramarz ibn Khodadad ibn 'Abd Allah al-Kateb al-Arrajani, *Samak-e 'Ayyar*, ed. P. N. Khanlari (Tehran, 1338 [1960]), vol. 1, pp. 10–16.
24. Rezavi, Modarres, *Ta'liqat-e "Hadiqat al-Haqiqat"* (Tehran, 1329 [1951]), p. 627. The full text of the *Hadiqat* was not available to me, but the anecdote is mentioned by Rezavi. See also 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Ahmad Jami, *Masnavi-e Haft Owraq*, ed. Morteza Modarres Gilani (Tehran, 1338 [1960]), pp. 272–274.
25. Abu Mansur Mohammad ibn Ahmad Daqiqi, *Daqiqi va Ash'ar-e u*, ed. Mohammad Dabirsiaqi (Tehran, 1342 [1964]), p. 109; French trans. in Gilbert Lazard, *Les premiers poètes persans* (Tehran and Paris, 1964), vol. 1, p. 155.
26. Sa'di, *Golestan*, ed. Mohammad 'Ali Forughī (Tehran, 1340 [1962]), p. 107; trans. Edward Rehatsek (New York, 1966), p. 164.
27. Hafez, *Divan*, ed. Mohammad Qazvini and Qasem Ghani (Tehran, n.d.), p. 125.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 272.
29. Mo'ezzi, *Divan*, p. 463.
30. Khwaju Kermani, *Divan*, p. 458.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 470.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 760.
33. Rashid al-Din Vatvat, *Divan*, p. 341.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 394.
35. Abu Mo'in Naser Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. Nasr Allah Taqavi et al. (Tehran, 1339 [1961]), p. 306.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
37. Hafez, *Divan*, p. 188.
38. Jalal al-Din Rumi, *Kolliyyat-e Shams*, ed. Badi' al-Zaman Foruzanfar (Tehran, 1336–1342 [1958–1964]), vol. 3, no. 1116.
39. Nasr Allah Falsafi, *Zendegani-e Shah 'Abbas-e Avval* (Tehran, 1334 [1956]), vol. 2, p. 297.
40. Farid al-Din 'Attar, *Mosibat Nama*, ed. Nurani Vesal (Tehran, 1338 [1960]), p. 353.
41. *Manteq al-Tayr*, ed. Mohammad Javad Mashkur (Tehran, 1347 [1969]), pp. 149–150.
42. *Elahi Nama*, ed. Hellmut Ritter (Istanbul and Leipzig, 1940), pp. 125–126.
43. Rumi, *The Mathnavi*, ed. and trans. R. A. Nicholson (London, 1925–1940), vol. 5, pp. 296–305; trans., vol. 6, pp. 282–290.

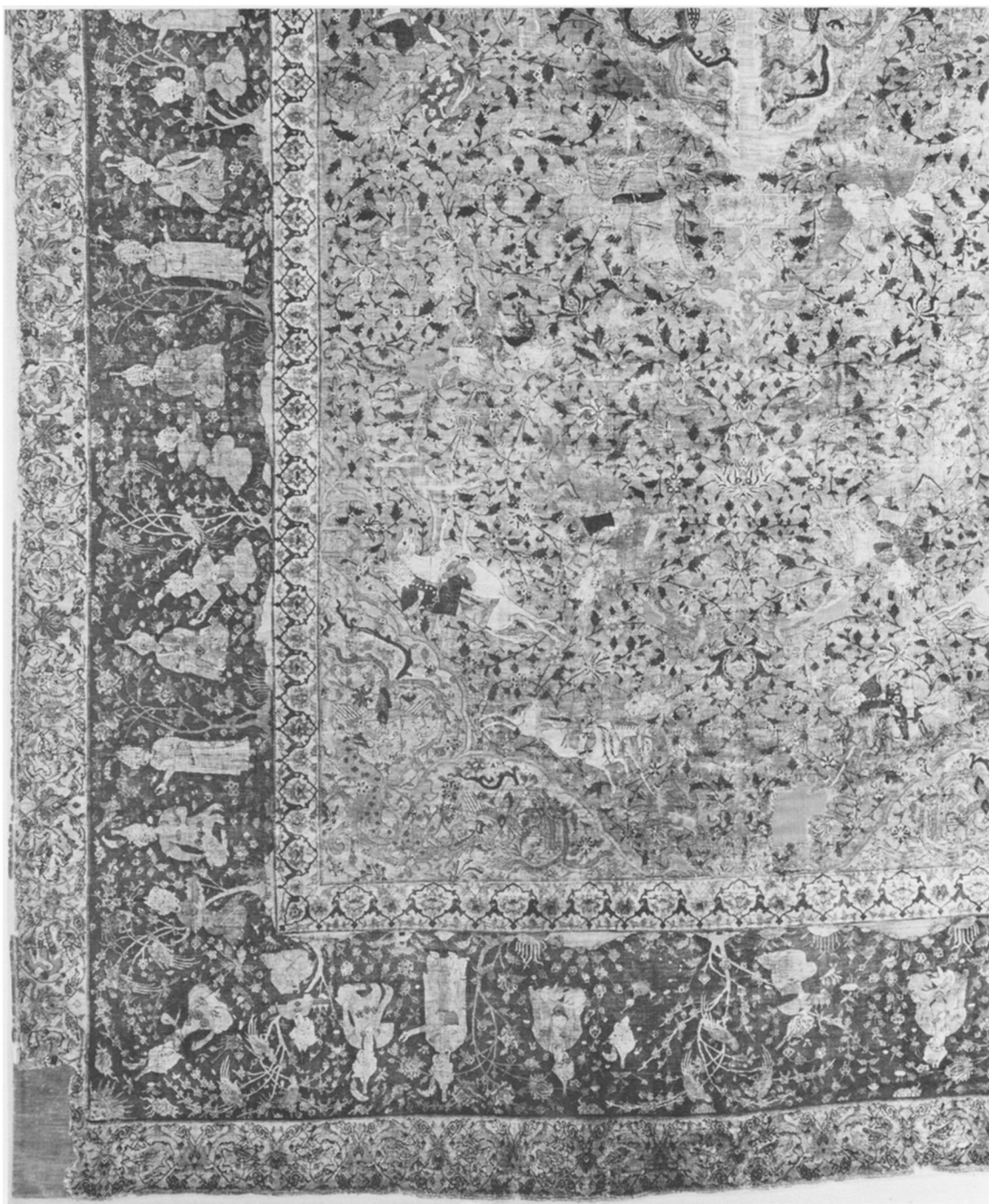






3. Boston carpet: detail of lower right quadrant.







5. Boston carpet: detail of upper left quadrant.

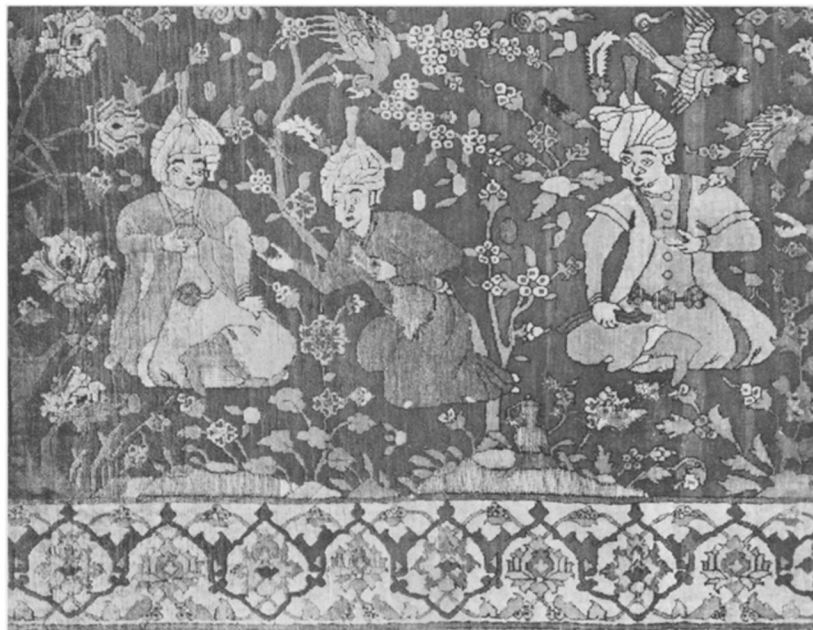






7. Boston carpet: detail of huntsman.

8. Boston carpet: detail of figures in border.





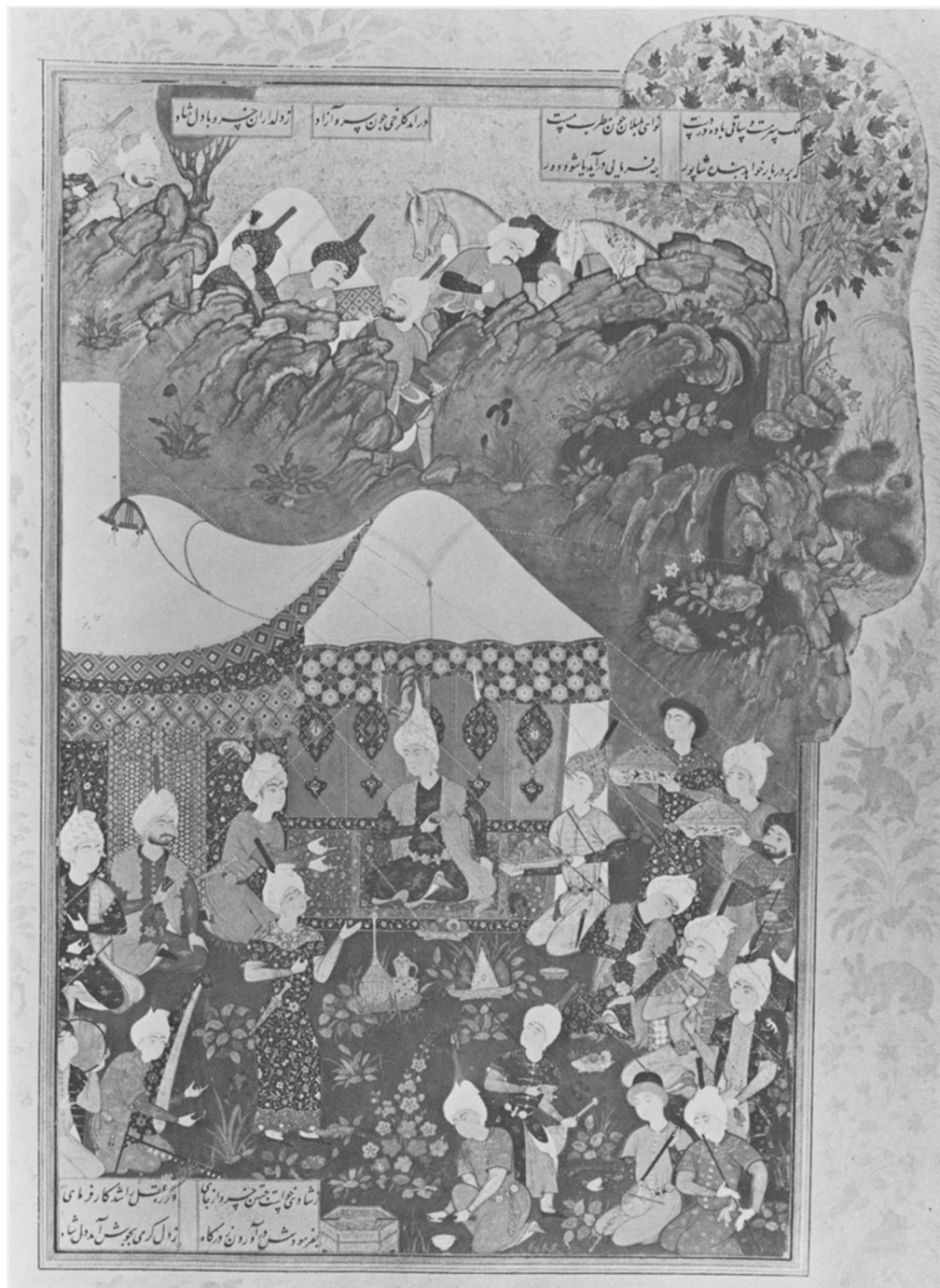
9. Dragons and phoenixes. Iran (Tabriz), Turkman School, late 15th century.  
*Topkapu Sarayı Museum, Istanbul, Album H. 2153.*



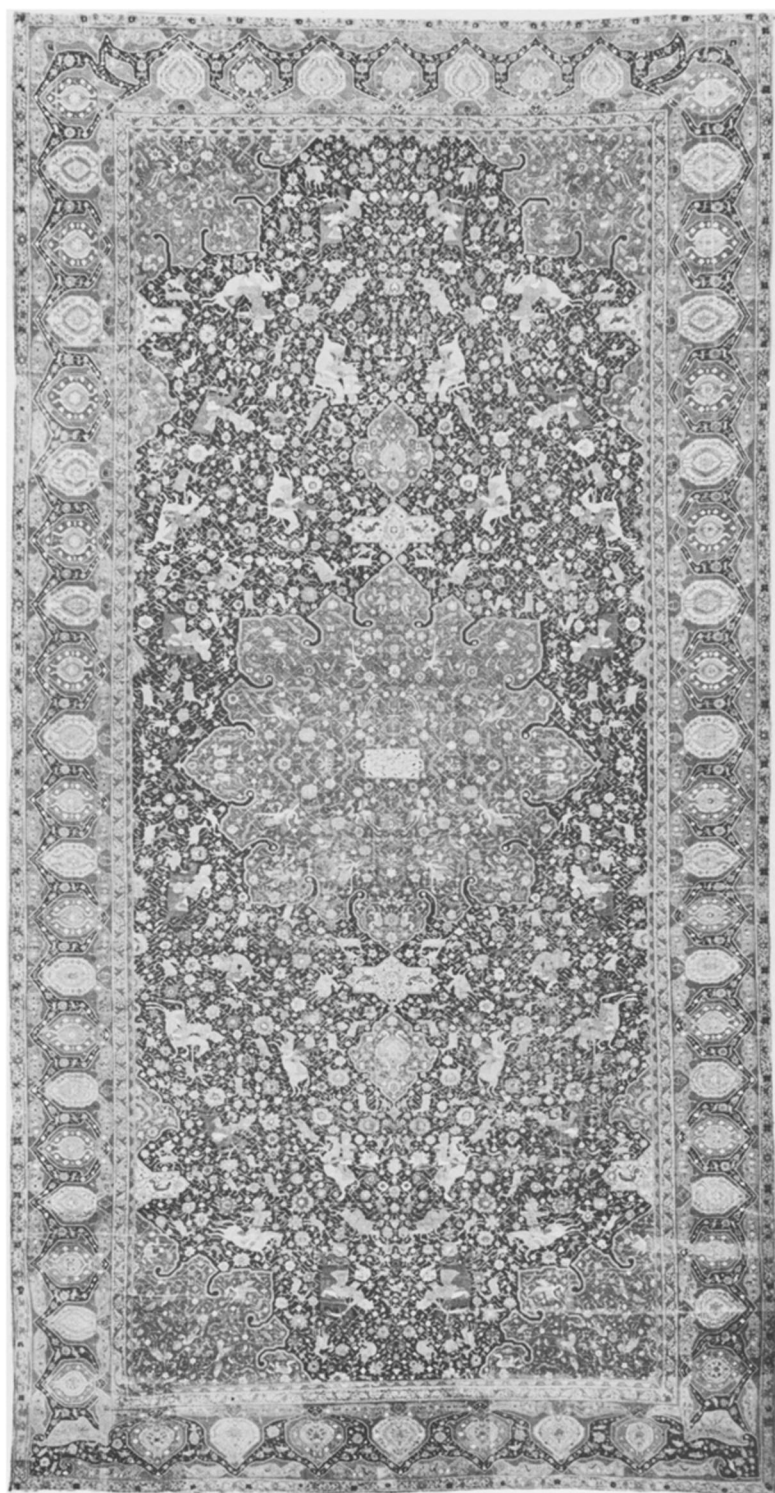
10. Battle scene, attributed to Bihzad. Iran (Herat), Timurid School, late 15th or early 16th century. Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University. Bequest of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller.







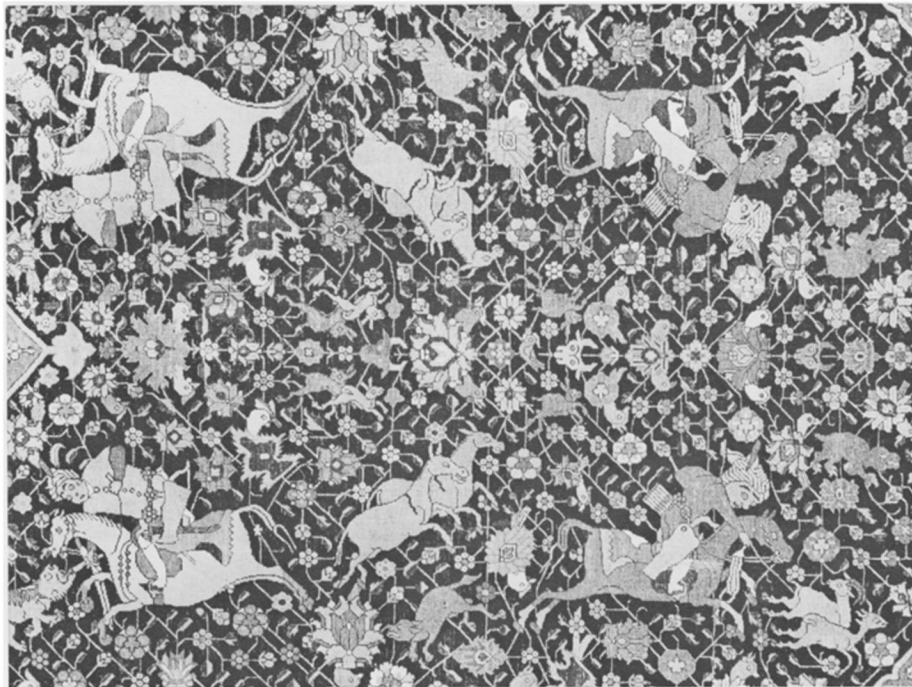
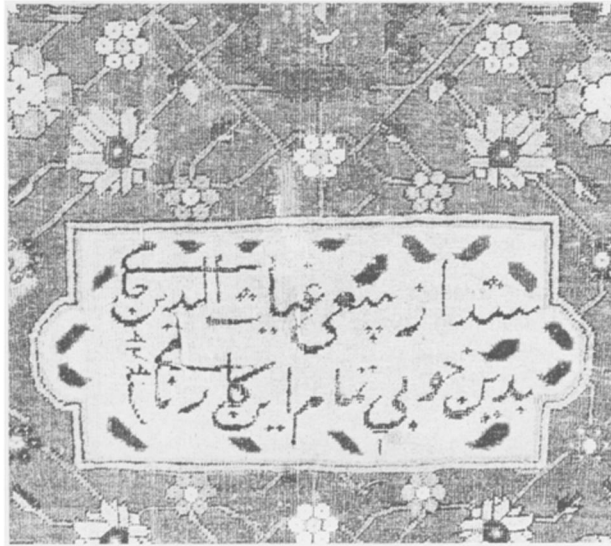
12. *The Return of Shapur to Khusrau*, by Aqa Mirak. Iran (Tabriz), Safavid School, from a *Khamsa* of Nezami, dated 1539–1543. British Museum, London, Or. 2265.



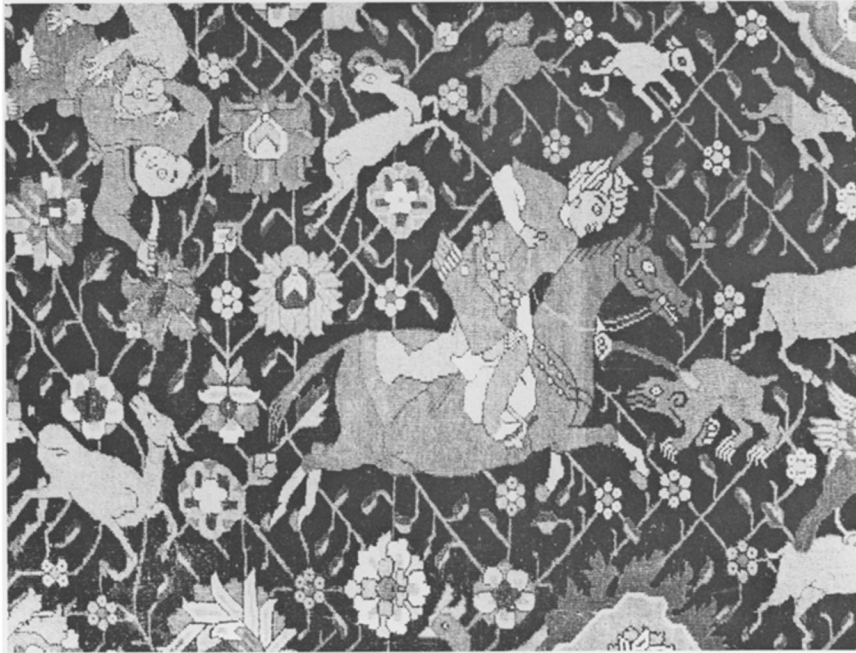
13. Hunting carpet. Iran, 1522–1523.  
*Poldi Pezzoli Museum, Milan.*

14. Milan carpet: detail of cartouche.

15. Milan carpet: detail of hunting scenes.

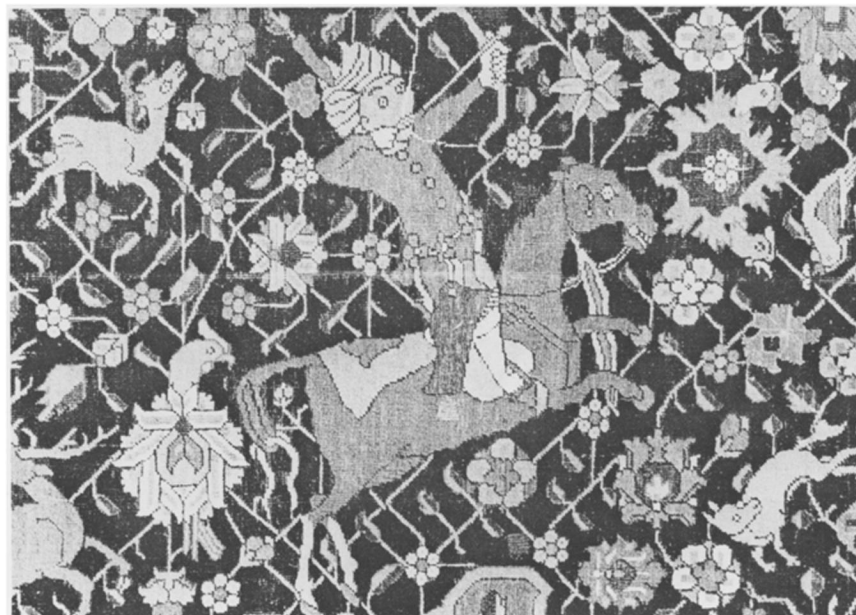


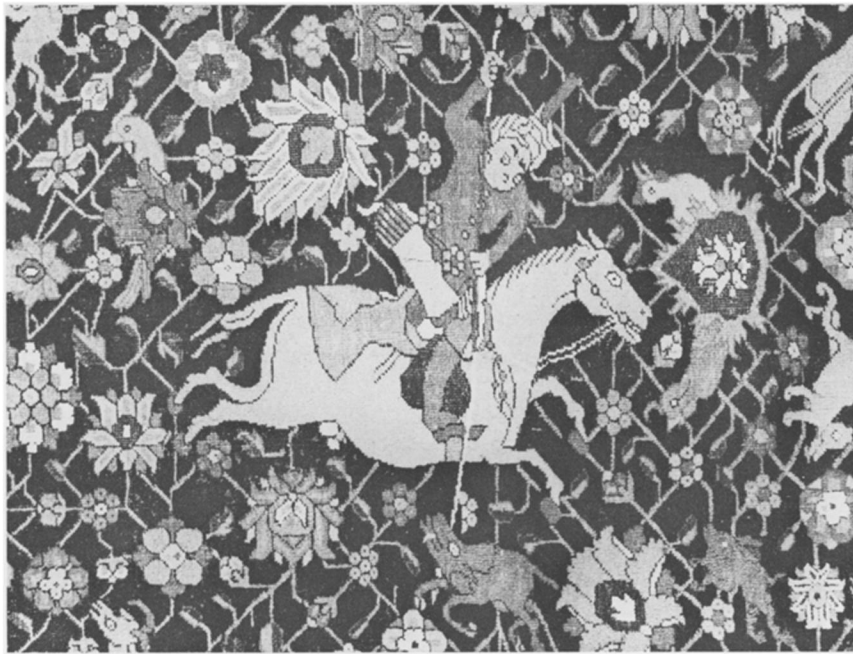




16. Milan carpet: detail of hunter with sword.

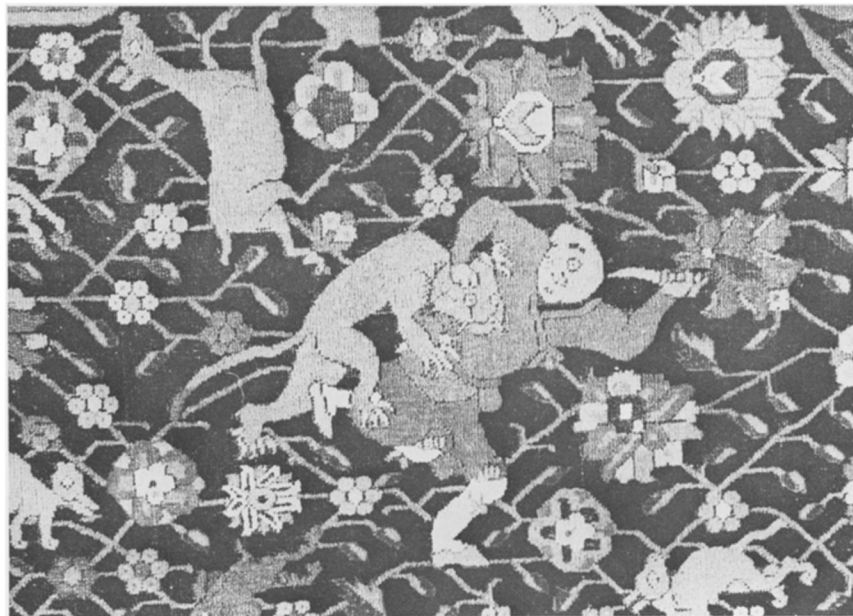
17. Milan carpet: detail of hunter with bow and arrow.





18. Milan carpet: detail of hunter with lance.

19. Milan carpet: detail of hunter attacking lion.





**20.** Hunting carpet: detail of phoenix and dragon in central medallion. Iran, 1537–1540.  
*Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna.*



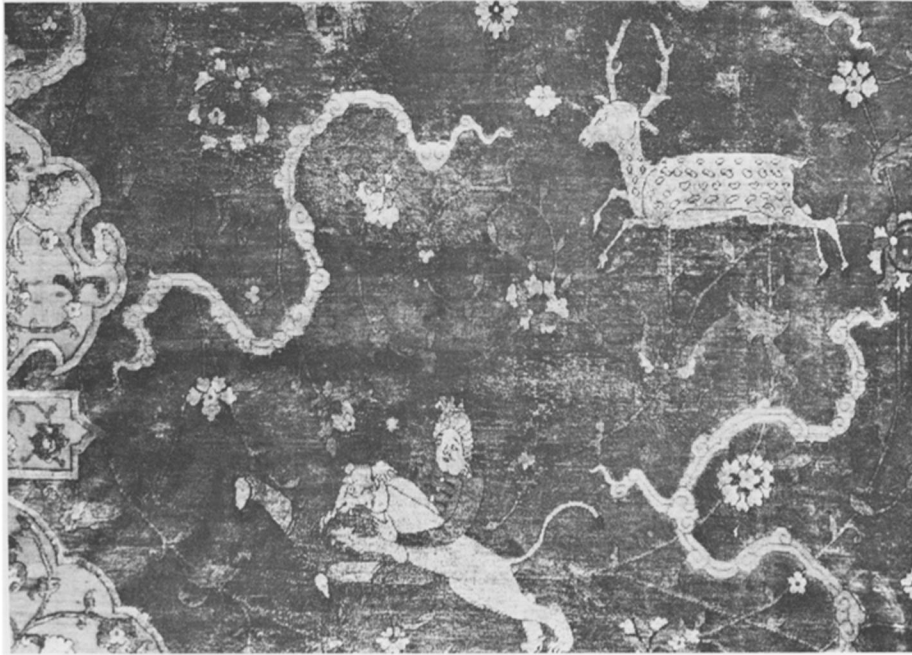
21. Vienna carpet: detail of hunting scene.

22. Vienna carpet: detail of winged houris in border.



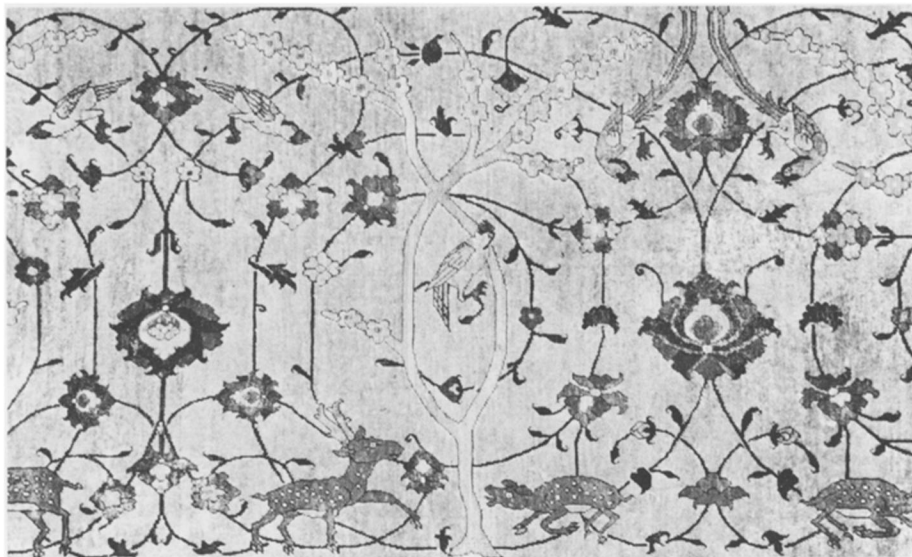


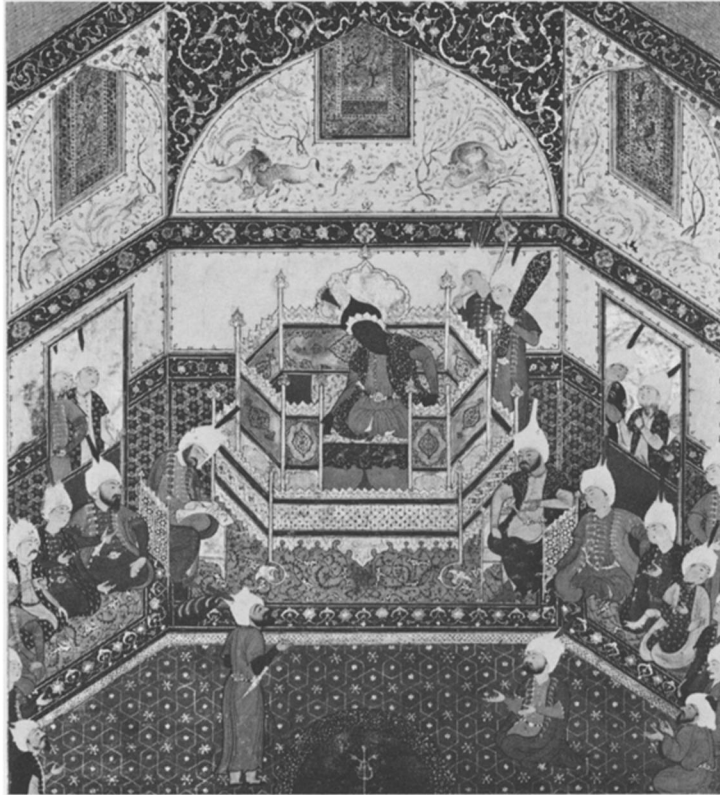




24. Stockholm carpet: detail of hunter and animals.

25. Stockholm carpet: detail of border.

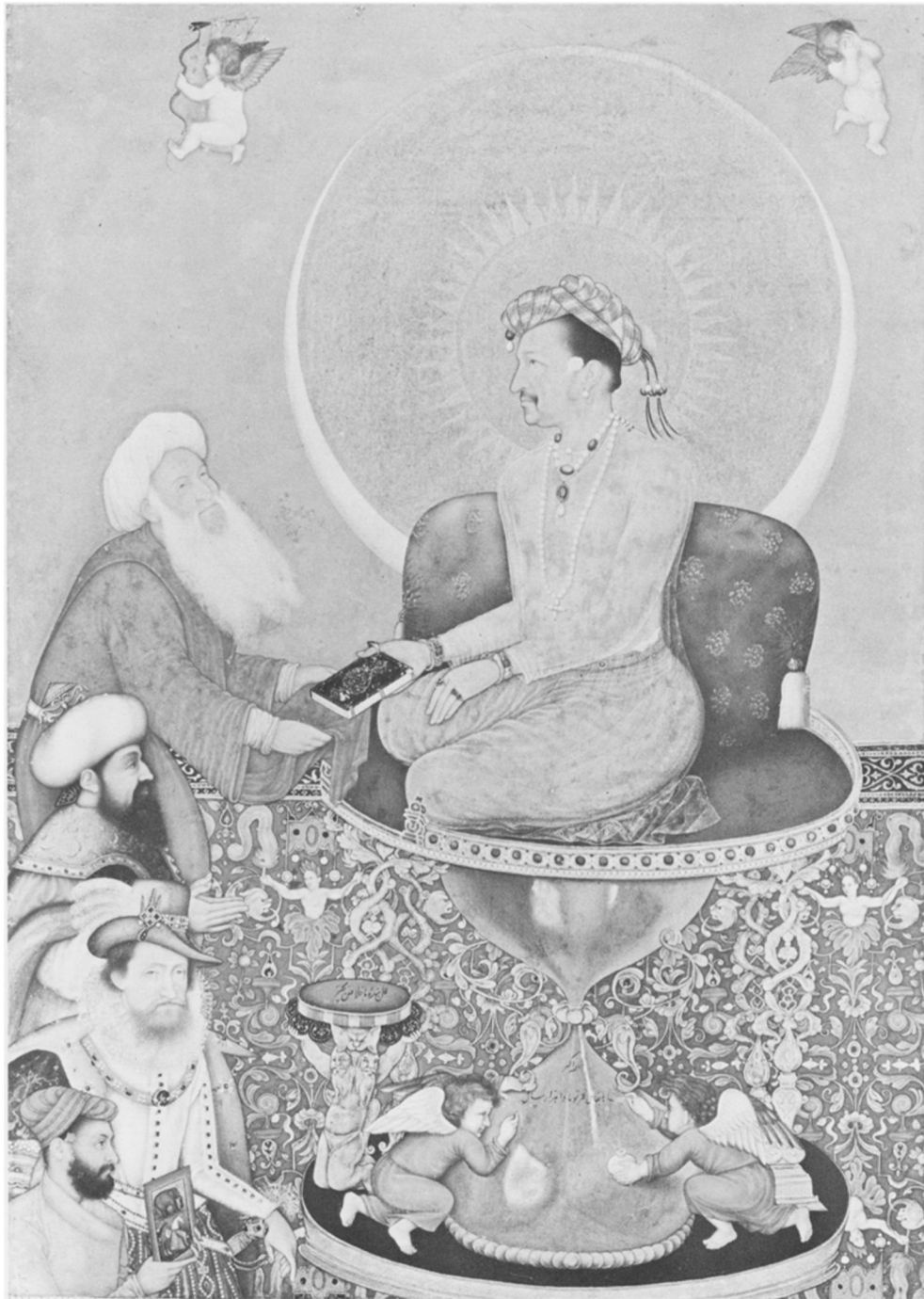




26. Key Ka'us Uprais Siyavush in a Letter, from the Houghton Shahnama, fol. 174 recto. Iran (Tabriz), ca. 1527–1528. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

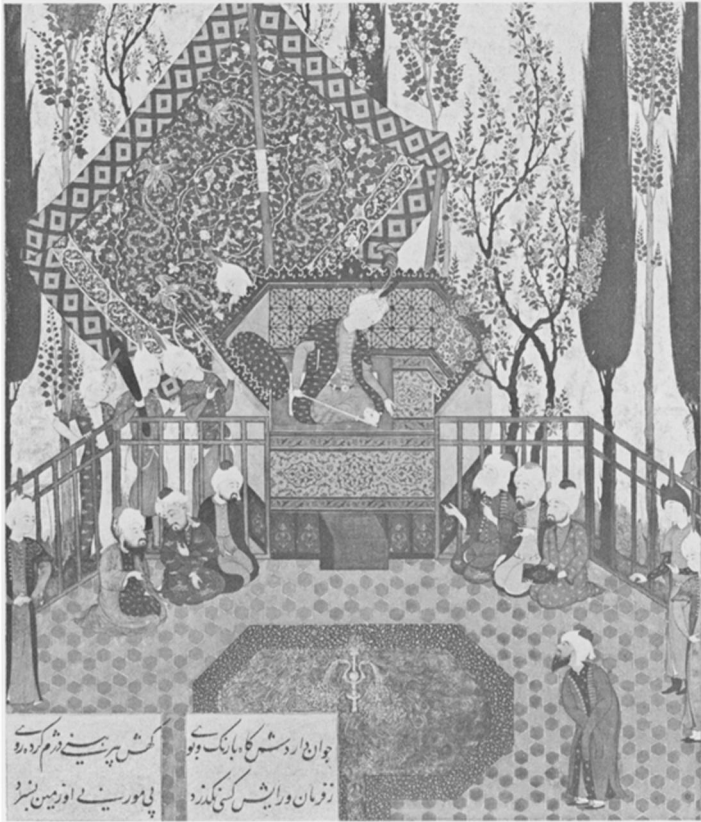


27. Polychrome painted bowl (*mina'i* ware). Iran, ca. 1200. Cleveland Museum of Art.

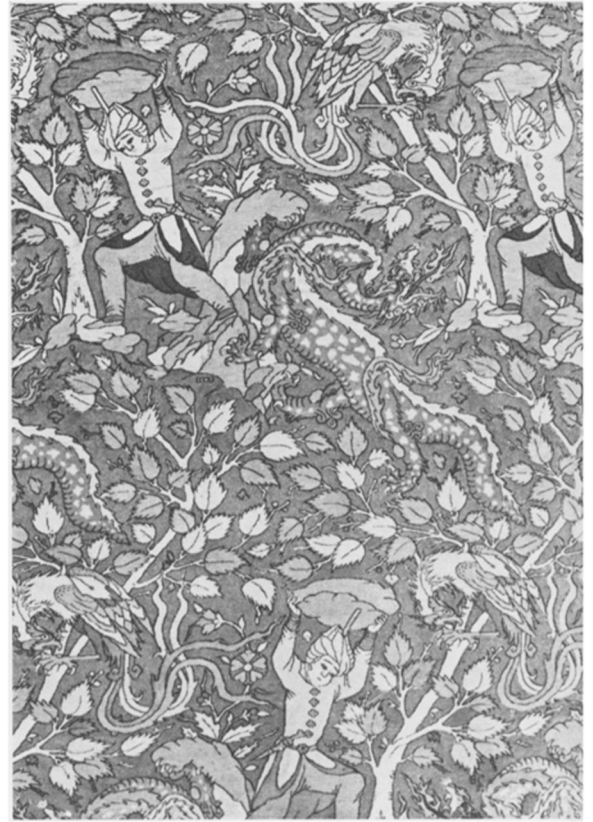


28. Allegorical audience scene of Jahangir, by Bichitr. India, Mogul School, ca. 1625.  
Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.





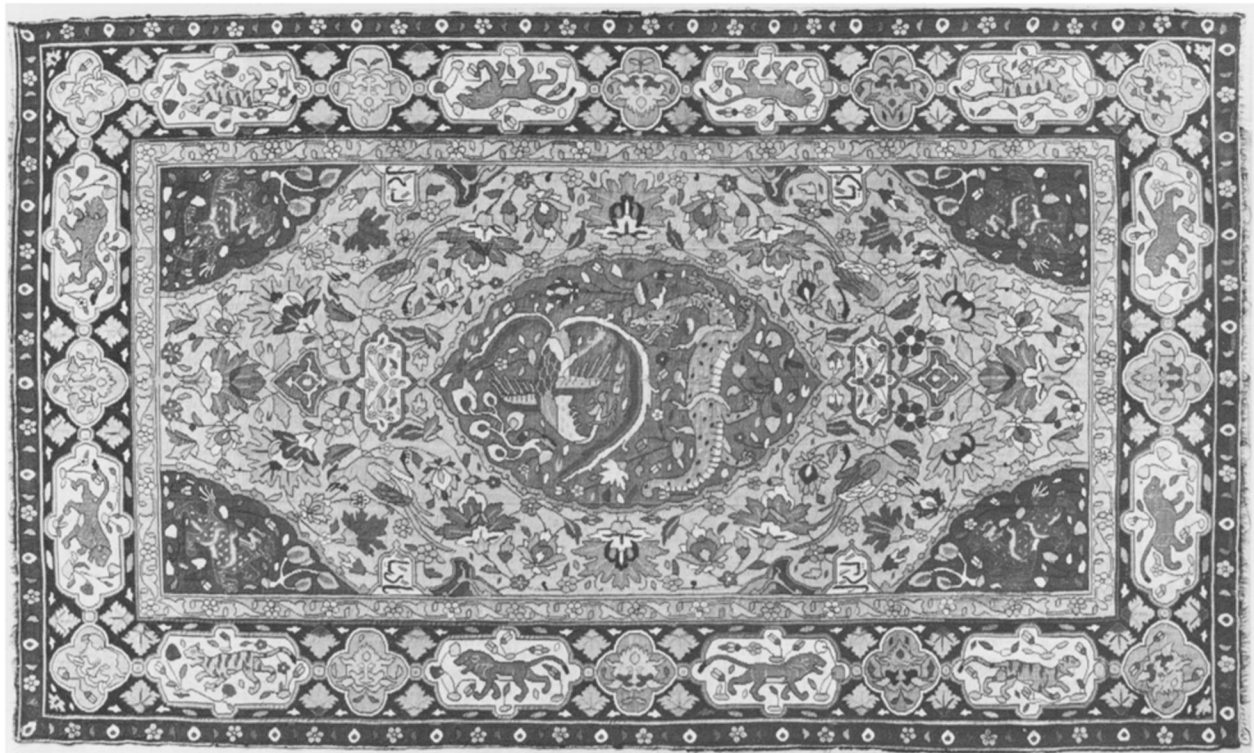
**29.** *Zal Consults with the Magi*, from the Houghton *Shahnama*, fol. 73 verso. Iran (Tabriz), ca. 1527–1528. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



**30.** Brocade: detail of a prince slaying a dragon with the protecting *simorgh* above. Iran, 1525–1550. Armory Museum in the Kremlin, Moscow. (After Friedrich Sarre and F. R. Martin, *Die Ausstellung von Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst in München*, 1910, Munich, 1912, vol. 3, pl. 196.)

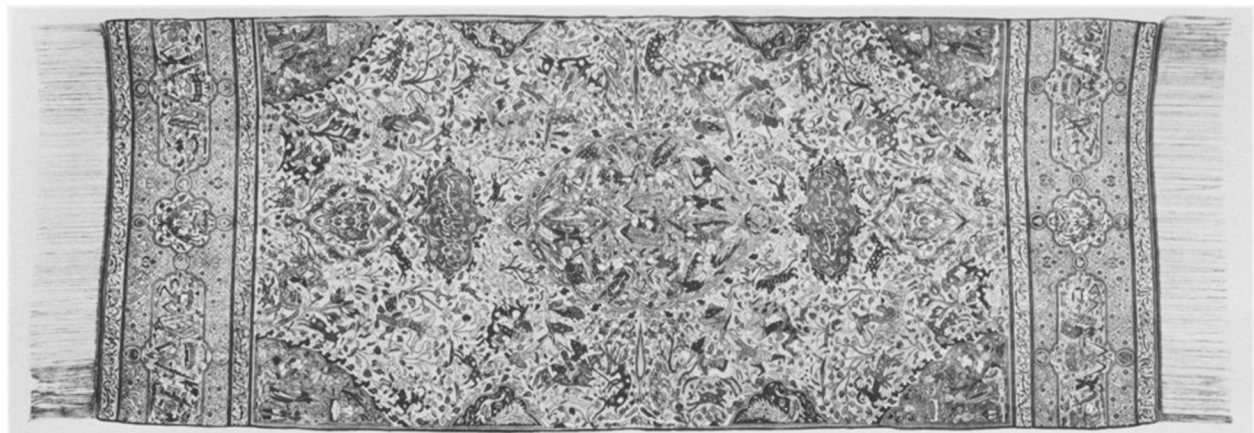


31. Silk tapestry. Iran, ca. 1600 (Shah Abbas period). Musée du Louvre, Paris.



32. Silk tapestry. Iran, ca. 1600 (Shah Abbas period). *Islamisches Museum, Berlin.*

33. Silk tapestry. Iran, ca. 1600 (Shah Abbas period). *Residenzmuseum, Munich.*  
(Friedrich Sarre and Hermann Trenkwald, *Old Oriental Carpets*, Vienna, Schroll, 1929, vol. 2, pl. 47.  
Reproduced by permission of Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna.)

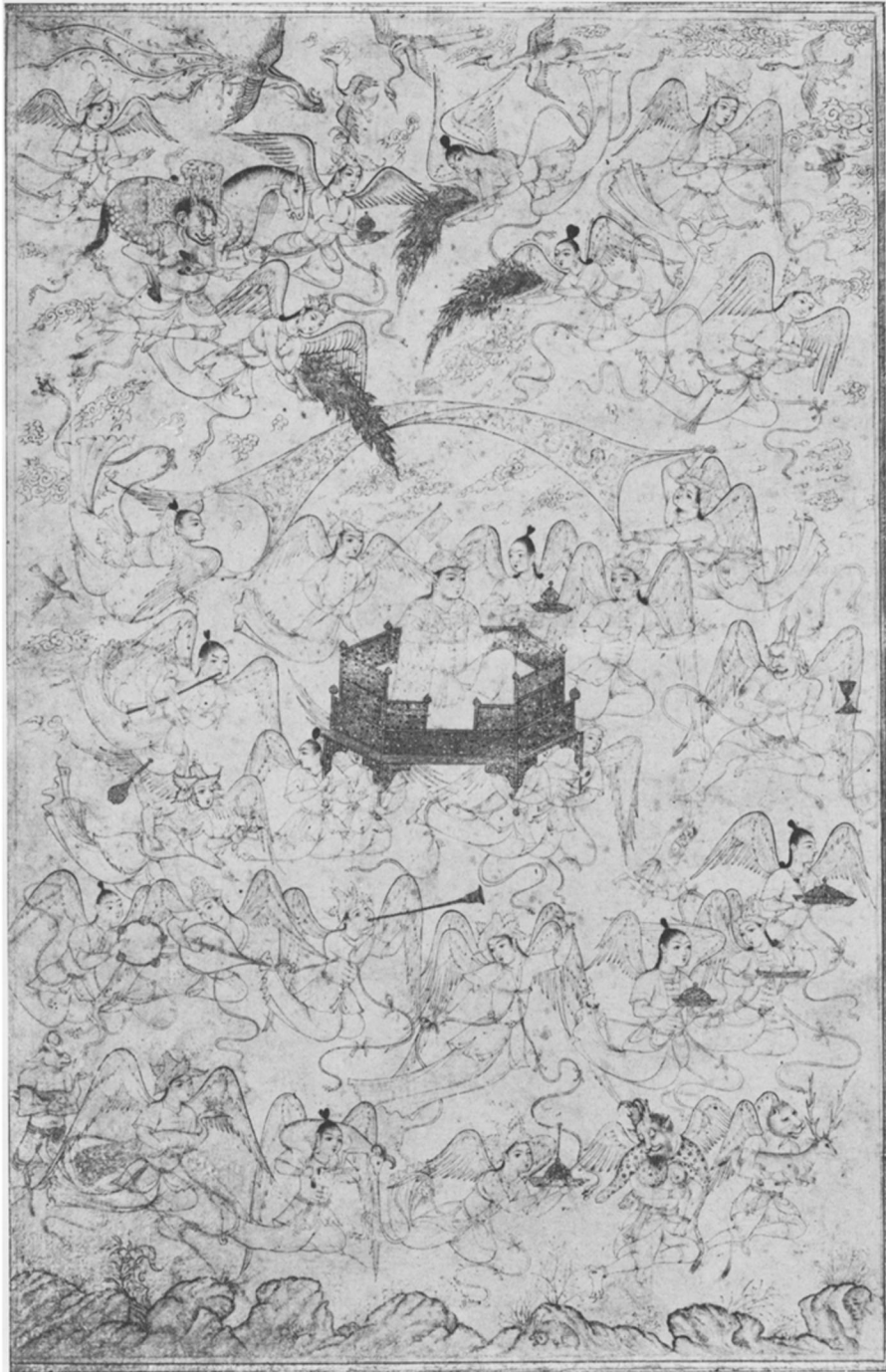




**34.** Hall of One Hundred Columns, Persepolis, relief showing the elevation of the throne. 5th century B.C. (Photo R. Ghirshman.)  
Note that the throne legs are not on the ground on which the throne bearers stand.

**35.** Hall of One Hundred Columns, Persepolis, relief showing king slaying a lion. 5th century B.C. (Photo from Herzfeld Archives, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.)





36. The ascension of an enthroned prince. Iran, early 16th century.  
*Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.*



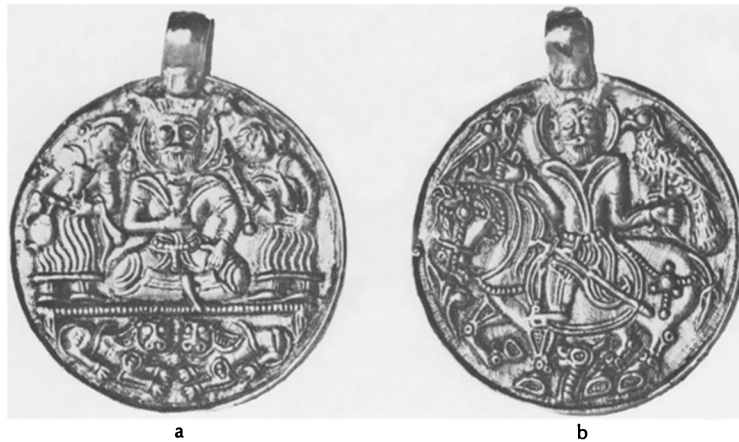


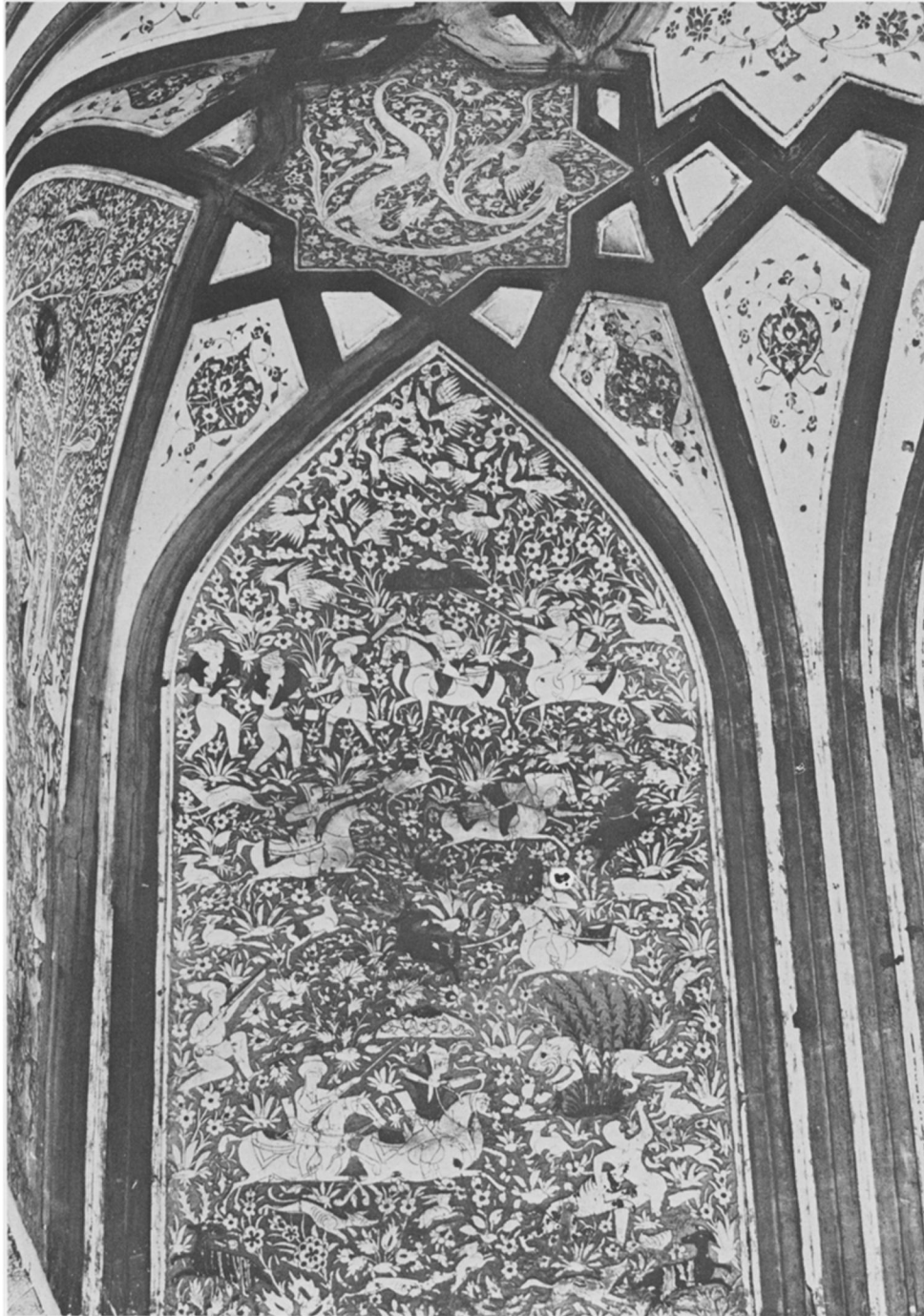
37. Silk tapestry, detail of Samson and the lion. Egypt (Alexandria), 6th–7th century.  
*Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington, D.C.*



**38.** Partially gilt silver plate showing King Hormuzd II (302–309) at the lion hunt. Iran, early 4th century (Sasanian period). *Cleveland Museum of Art.*

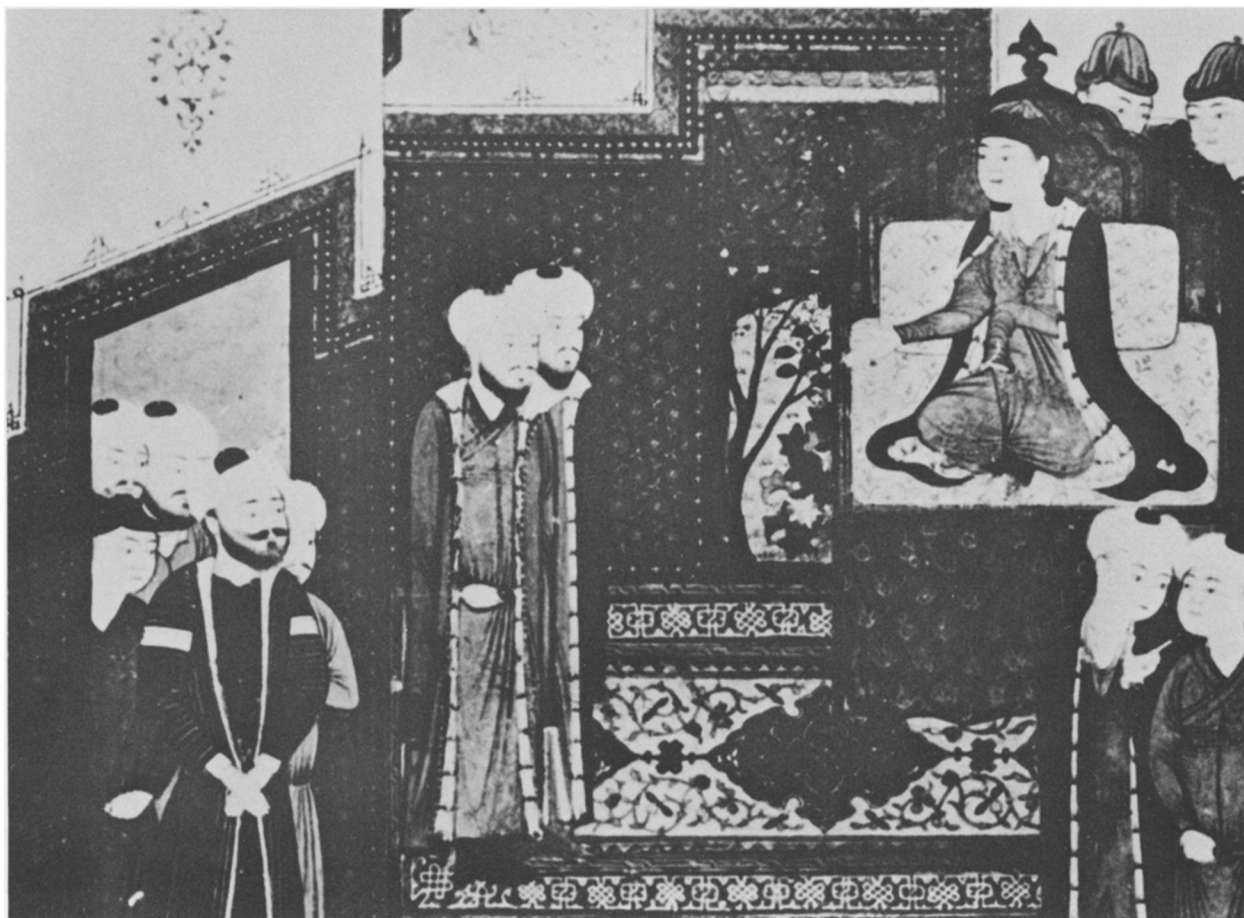
**39.** Gold medal. Iran, 11th–12th century (late Buyid or early Seljuq period). *Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.*  
a. Obverse: king feasting. b. Reverse: king hunting with falcon.





**40.** Colored stucco decorations from a palace in Nayin, Iran, 1524–1576 (Shah Tahmasp period).  
(Photo courtesy of Ingeborg Luschey.)



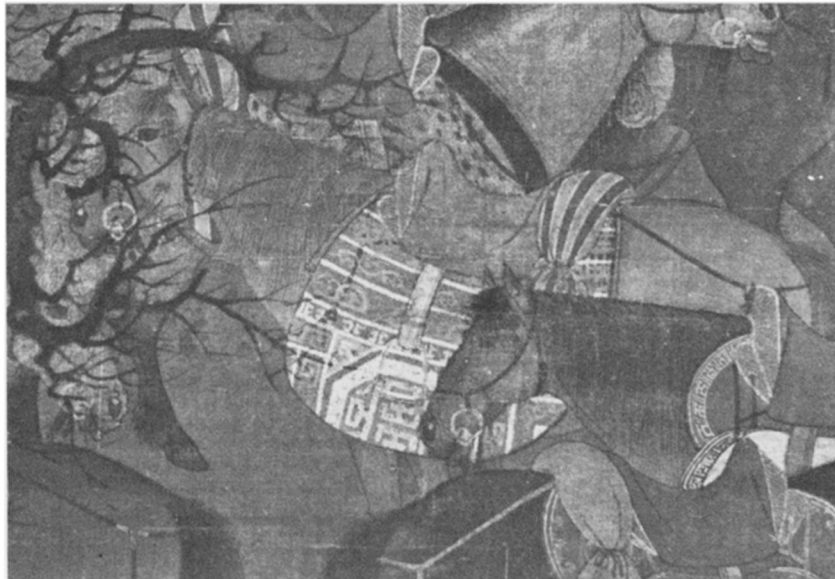


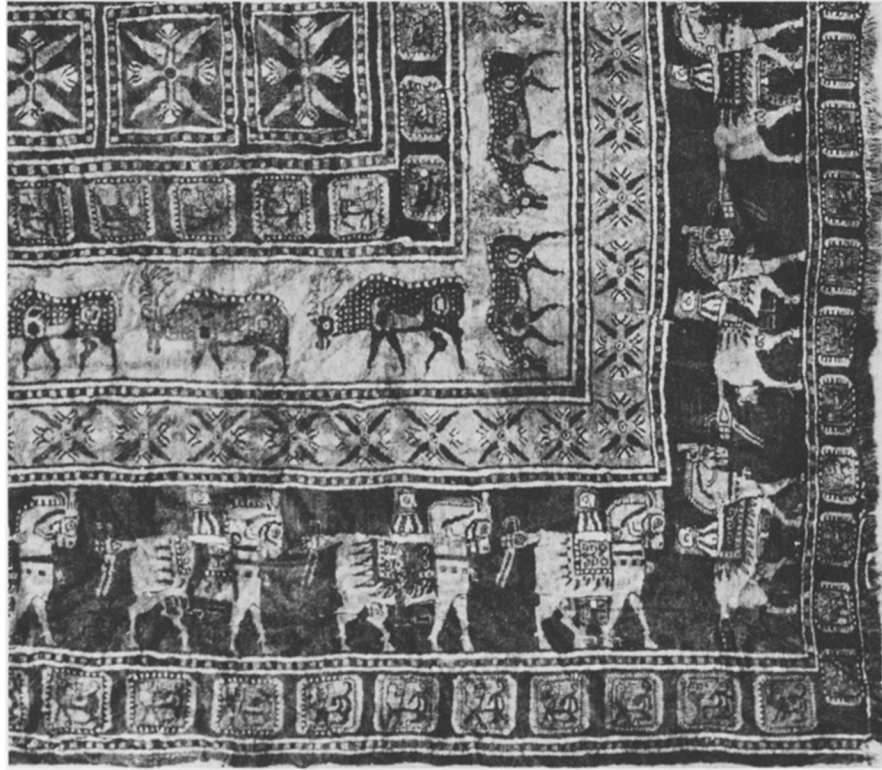
41. *Khosrow Receives Farhad*, from a *Khamsa* of Nezami, fol. 62 recto.  
Iran (Herat), 1445–1446. Topkapu Sarayı Museum, Istanbul, Hazineh 781.



42. *Wen-chi's Return to China*, by Ch'en Chü-chung: detail of figures seated on a carpet of centralized composition. Ca. 1205 (Sung dynasty). *Chinese National Palace Museum, Taichung*.

43. *Wen-chi's Return to China*, by Ch'en Chü-chung: detail of a carpet of geometric design used as a saddle blanket.





44. Knotted carpet from Pazyryk. Iran, 5th century B.C. *Hermitage Museum, Leningrad.*

45. Knotted carpet from Pazyryk: detail of griffon. (Drawing by Louis Kunsch after S. I. Rudenko, *The Culture of the Population of the Upper Altai Region*, Moscow, 1953, fig. 193.)

46. Unit of a repeat pattern of a carpet in *Zahhak Enthroned*, from the *Royal Shahnama*. Iran, ca. 1330. *Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.*, no. 23.5. (Drawing by Barbara H. Hawley after Frank A. Haentschke.)





47. Hunting carpet. Iran, 19th or early 20th century. *Musée du Louvre, Paris.*



48. Pile carpet depicting Nadir Shah Afshar enthroned and hunting scenes in border. Iran, 18th century. Collection unknown.



**49.** Floor mosaic in the triclinium of the House of Narcissus, Antioch, 2nd century A.D.

**50.** Floor mosaic (the so-called Worcester Hunt). Antioch, early 6th century. Worcester Art Museum.

